

Message Text

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PAGE 01 NEW DE 01080 201752Z
ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-05 H-01 INR-07
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C O N F I D E N T I A L NEW DELHI 1080

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: IN, US
SUBJECT: AFTERMATH OF PRESIDENT'S VISIT TO INDIA

REF:STATE 12714

1. WE CONTINUE TO BELIEVE, AS WE DID WHEN HE LEFT HERE
OVER TWO WEEKS AGO, THAT THE PRESIDENT'S VISIT WAS A
SOLID SUCCESS IN ACHIEVING ITS PRIMARY AIMS OF STRENGTHENING
US-INDIAN UNDERSTANDING AND CONTRIBUTING TO A CLOSER
RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE LEADERS OF THE TWO COUNTRIES. WE
RECOGNIZE, OF COURSE, THAT THE OPEN MIKE INCIDENT FOCUSED
GREATER ATTENTION ON OUR NUCLEAR DIFFERENCES THAN EITHER
WE OR THE INDIANS HAD WANTED. THE ABSENCE OF ANY OTHER
EQUALLY EYE-CATCHING HARD NEWS IN THE COURSE OF THE VISIT
CONTRIBUTED TO THIS, AND THE SUBSEQUENT VISITS OF THE
SENATE CODEL AND PM CALLAGHAN PROLONGED IT. THE HIGHLIGHTING
OF THE NUCLEAR ISSUE HAS NOT, HOWEVER, SERVED TO SPOIL THE
VISIT.

2. THE MOST PERSUASIVE EVIDENCE FOR OUR CONTINUING
POSITIVE ASSESSMENT IS THE WAY PM DESAI AND OTHER SENIOR
INDIAN LEADERS HAVE SPOKEN AND ACTED SINCE THE VISIT. WE
FIND THE TONE AND CONTENT OF DESAI'S LETTER TO THE PRESIDENT
PARTICULARLY SIGNIFICANT IN THIS REGARD. OTHER CABINET
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PAGE 02 NEW DE 01080 201752Z

MINISTERS AND LEADERS, WHO HAVE NO REASON NOT TO BE CANDID
WITH US, HAVE SPOKEN ENTHUSIASTICALLY TO US ABOUT THE
FAVORABLE IMPRESSION THE PRESIDENT PERSONALLY AND THE VISIT AS A
WHOLE MADE ON THEM AND THEIR ASSOCIATES. IN SUM, WE BELIEVE
THE VISIT SCORED WELL WHERE IT MOST MATTERED -- IN THE IMPACT
IT HAD ON THE GOI LEADERSHIP. OUR DIPLOMATIC COLLEAGUES HERE
GENERALLY SHARE THIS JUDGEMENT.

3. PRESS REACTION HAS BEEN LESS FAVORABLE. WE HAVE NOT YET WORKED UP A COMPREHENSIVE REVIEW OF THE MEDIA PLAY THE VISIT GOT -- USIS IS PREPARING THIS -- BUT THE PRESS REACTION WAS CLEARLY MIXED. THE TIMES OF INDIA, CITED IN THE REFTEL, HAS BEEN NOTABLY NEGATIVE AND WASPISH. SO HAS HINDU NEW DELHI CORRESPONDENT G.K. REDDY. THE NUCLEAR ISSUE HAS OF COURSE FIGURES PROMINENTLY, AND IN SOME COMMENTARIES THE PRESIDENT WAS CONTRASTED UNFAVORABLY WITH CALLAGHAN IN THE WAY HE APPROACHED THIS. IN WHAT SEEMS TO US AN ALMOST INEVITABLE THROWBACK TO AN EARLIER DAY, SOME COMMENTARIES HAVE CRITICIZED THE ABSENCE OF "ANYTHING REALLY SUBSTANTIAL", I.E. A LARGE ASSISTANCE PACKAGE, IN THE VISIT.

4. PERHAPS WE ARE LOOKING FOR THE SILVER LINING, BUT IT SEEMS TO US THAT SOME OF THIS ADVERSE AND OFTEN MISCONCEIVED COMMENT MAY ULTIMATELY BE TO THE GOOD IN BUILDING A MORE REALISTIC PUBLIC ASSESSMENT OF THE POSSIBILITIES IN INDO-US RELATIONS AND UNDERCUTTING THE OVEREXPECTATIONS AND EUPHORIA WHICH HAVE BEEN OUR BANE. BUT THAT IS A FAR CRY FROM THE "NEGATIVE CAST" SUGGESTED IN THE REFTEL.
GOHEEN

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